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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 003624

SIPDIS

NSC FOR CBARTON  
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO MARACAY

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Political Counselor, for Reason 1.4(d)  
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Summary  
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1. (U) The Ambassador visited Maracay, Aragua State, November 16, 2004 and met with the president of the Aragua State judges, the mayor, business leaders and the press. He also stopped by an agricultural laboratory that receives U.S. funding (despite the Ministry of Science and Technology declining the request for a formal visit). During each meeting and following press event, the Ambassador highlighted previous U.S. assistance and the benefits it had produced for Aragua State. He emphasized cooperation and progress in areas where the U.S. and Venezuela coincided (energy, illegal drugs, and terrorism). The Ambassador also said he hoped, without altering fundamental USG positions of principle, to reduce the tone and volume of the rhetoric in areas in which the countries disagreed (democratic institutions, regional politics, human rights, etc.). End Summary.

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The Players  
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2. (U) The Ambassador visited Maracay, Aragua State, a pro-Chavez agricultural state, November 16, 2004. He briefly toured an agricultural research laboratory that receives U.S. funding. The Ministry of Science and Technology had declined the request for a formal visit. The Ambassador called on Dr. Juan Ibarra, president of the Aragua State judicial circuit and a former IV grantee. Ibarra explained the progress the courts of Aragua had made as a direct result of U.S. assistance (modernization, congruency of decisions, etc. and said he was interested in increased cooperation, especially in the courtroom management and logistics. The Ambassador also met with former Army colonel Humberto Prieto, mayor of Maracay (Movimiento Quinta Republica\*MVR), and about 20 leaders of American and Venezuelan businesses, granting press interviews after each. He then spoke with the boards of the two leading newspapers, the centrist "El Aragueno" (circulation 55,000) and the anti-Chavez "El Siglo," (circulation 75,000) agreeing to an interview at the latter. Filippo Sindoni, President of "El Aragueno," confirmed several business leaders' assertions that the economy in Aragua State seems to be recovering.

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The Message and the Media  
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3. (U) During each meeting and press event the Ambassador highlighted previous U.S. assistance and the benefits it has produced for Aragua State. He emphasized cooperation and progress in areas where the U.S. and Venezuela coincided (energy, illegal drugs, and terrorism), and said that while the USG would maintain its principled positions, he hoped to reduce the tone and volume of the rhetoric in areas in which the countries disagreed (democratic institutions, regional politics, human rights, etc.). Fielding questions the Ambassador said Secretary Powell's resignation was in line with cabinet changes that typically occur after the first term; he praised Condoleezza Rice's nomination; and he reiterated President Bush's commitment to Latin America and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

4. (U) Both "El Siglo" and "El Aragueno" featured front-page coverage of the Ambassador's visit. There was also local radio and regional television coverage. The message concentrated on the benefits that relations with the United States bring, reduced tone and volume of rhetoric, Secretary Powell's resignation, and Condoleezza Rice's nomination. "El Universal," the leading conservative newspaper, briefly mentioned the Ambassador's comments on the latter.

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Comment  
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15. (C) The Ambassador's visit publicly highlighted the people-to-people benefits a relationship with the United States could bring in a traditionally pro-Chavez state. The Ambassador's originally approved requests for a meeting with Chavista Governor Didalco Bolivar and the visit to the

agricultural research laboratory partially sponsored by the U.S. were both canceled at the last minute with improbable explanations. The request to meet with Garrison Commander General Gustavo Rangel Briceno went unanswered. The informal call on the laboratory despite the Ministry of Science and Technology declining showed that we would not be sidelined by the GOV's attempt to limit Embassy access.  
Brownfield

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